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AUTHOR Haugen; Nancy S., Ed.; And Others

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ABSTRACT

A product of the Wisconsin Writing Project, this guide for teachers is intended to stimulate students' writing and reading of poetry and help them derive a greater understanding of the craft. A discussion of definitions and an overview of the guide are followed by descriptions of student needs and goals. The major portion of the guide contains a variety of activities for K-12, divided into primary, intermediate, and secondary levels, each with objectives, strategies, activities, and models. This is followed by suggestions for evaluating poetry at the elementary and secondary levels. The guide concludes with a bibliography and a list of other suggested resources. (HTH)

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A GUIDE TO TEACHING

CREATIVE WRITING: POETRY

Jan Bonsett-Veal
Coleen Burns
Jacqueline Martindale
Susan McKamey
Joan Shaw
Estela E. Valdez

Edited By

Nancy S. Haugen
John M. Kean
Maribeth Mohan

WISCONSIN WRITING PROJECT 1981

University of Wisconsin-Madison

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PROJECT DIRECTOR: John M. Kean, Professor
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
University of Wisconsin-Madison

PROJECT COORDINATORS: Nancy S. Haugen, Maribeth Mohan
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
University of Wisconsin-Madison

PROJECT SUPPORT STAFF: Donna L. Fisker, Guy Keshena, Peggy Scott

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Nathan S. Blount, Professor
Chairperson, W. W. P.
UW-Madison

Bonnie Faust
Oregon School Dist.

Steven Fortney
Stoughton Public Schools

Phillip Helgesen, Dist. Adm.
Oregon Public Schools

Margaret Jensen
Madison Metro. School Dist.

Robert Kellner
Wisconsin Dept. Public Instr.

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UW-Madison

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UW-Madison

Donald Hafeman, Sup't.
Madison Metro. School Dist.

Mary Lou Sharpee
Columbus Public Schools

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UW-Madison

Carrol Theobald
James Madison Memorial H. S.

EX OFFICIO

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Undergraduate Orientation
UW-Madison

Peter J. Burke, Exec. Sec.
Wisconsin Improvement Program
UW-Madison

Blair Matthews, Asst. to
Vice Chancellor
UW-Madison

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DEDICATION

To all teachers and children
Gentle and strong
Who with beautiful words
Provide a meaning to life
Who with patience and strength
Create edifices in children's
minds.

E.E.V.

Definitions and Overview

(Worlds are created.
Colors never seen before flash in some child's rainbow
Poem.
Dreams can fly in Boeing 747's
In some teenager's tripping out, natural high
Poem.
Heart purée, gut frappé
Concentrate, boil down,
Skill to make a jellied world
With a rhyme, the one, right word economy.
Precision, concision, control, fluidity
Diversity, muddle and order . . .)

"Don't no one haf ta look at it"
Just for me, or you, or him, or Mom,
This is just to say
What Hallmark didn't.

I should learn how to handle it,
What trowel or blender or brush,
What tuba or tympani or trumpet
'to make words sing.'

No need for footnotes
Just search and re-search
With a 'lucid eye.' Ma, I can see.
Search you and sunsets and Grandma's death
The cute guy on the bus, and semi-trucks
And hayfields for tulips
I'll understand.
Paradox is essential. Oxymoron - sharp/dull.
I'll metaphor in a desert,
I'll go simile a little,
I'll clap a dactyl and see dinosaurs,
And I'll hear birds out of anapestic forests
And elephants stampeding onomatopoeia.
Like Superman, I'll be: POW, CRACK;
BAMMING words and worlds
With my own supercharged dynamo laser.

Hearing is believing.
I'll create.
Flexibility. I'll perceive. I'll taste.
Dandelion dust. I'll create. I'll empathize
With eagles.
Baby, I'll synthesize the sound of corn
Growing in August.
Eyes like Argos to perceive;
Eyes like ogres to choose.
Honest as denim bibs.
Man, I'll harmonize unicorns and apple trees,
I'll only be practical for me,
The words will find me,
And I'll grow like a sunflower.
I'll find higher realms in sandpiles
And concrete and meadows and traffic.
I'll walk with Al Einstein
And he'll show me how imagination is
Greater than knowledge.
Teacher, open the cage
Let loose the spring
And fling me, stimulated by your sight
Across the universe
And my simple, single, silver soul.

J.P.M.

The processes, the tools, the subjects, and products of creativity are as wide and as varied as the poem above suggests. In this guide, we will offer strategies for teachers K-12 'to let loose the spring' for children through poetry, the most concentrated expression of experience in the written word.

In order to stimulate the writing, and reading too, of poetry, it is necessary to understand that "poetry. . . means language that excites."[1] Teachers and poets of our culture have names for poetic techniques and forms of poetry that help language excite readers. The technique may be anything from rhyme to onomatopoeia; the forms, sonnets to limericks. It is not necessary that children need to

---

[1]Barbara Juster Esbensen, A Celebration of Bees, Helping Children Write Poetry. (Minneapolis, Minnesota, Winston Press, Inc., 1975), p. 12.

know form or technique to find language which excites. "Creative expression should never be confused with the teaching of the techniques of writing. . . . Given stimulus, ideas come pouring from the mind like water from a fountain. It's all too easy to stop the creative flow. Rules for punctuation, spelling, grammar, and handwriting will stop it."[2]

In this guide we will consider form and technique as tools. Indeed, in some cases words such as hyperbole or paradox or simile need not be used in working with children; just the excitement of the convention itself will be enough.

When dealing with the creative process, it is important to remember that approaches must be as varied as the variety of human experiences. This guide provides several approaches to teaching poetry. Specific poems are used to exemplify a particular technique, model or aspect. Ideas which will stimulate the students to begin writing poems are included. Most strategies used will focus on pre-writing experiences, useful to start the fountain flowing for students K-12. Included at the end of this book is a section dealing with postwriting issues which the evaluation of poetry elicits.

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[2]Lois Lenski,"Helping Children to Create" Children's Education 26 (November, 1949), p. 101-105.

Description of Student Needs & Goals

STUDENT NEEDS

The student needs

1. to have an open, relaxed, accepting atmosphere in which creative thinking is encouraged.
2. to develop the language arts skills of listening, reading, speaking, and writing through experiences and activities.
3. to be stimulated and given opportunities to practice divergent thinking processes.
4. to formulate criteria for judging and making decisions in order to evaluate a finished product.
5. to experience various poetic forms (haiku, cinquain, couplet, etc.) appropriate to his/her development.
6. to experience various poetic techniques (rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, etc.) appropriate to development.
7. to use poetry to express feelings and relate personal experiences.

STUDENT GOALS

The student should

1. feel comfortable with and relate to poetry as a positive experience.
2. generate a varied number of unique ideas and responses to stimuli.
3. respond to things with different points of view.
4. take a basic idea and elaborate on it.
5. express one's self with clarity.
6. write poetry frequently.

Activities K-12

The following pages include numerous classroom activities for poetry writing which have been divided into primary, intermediate, and secondary levels. With slight adaptations in sophistication most activities can be used at more than one level.

Primary Activities

"I Like To" Poems. Using each child's favorite choices.

Objectives:

1. To discover the different things students like and dislike.
2. To focus upon personal choices.

Strategies:

1. Share personal likes and dislikes as a teacher.
2. Share likes and dislikes and write these on the blackboard or chart.
3. Use all suggestions whether silly or serious. (Children become involved if the teacher allows them freedom to be themselves.)
4. Use creative movement to express likes.

Models:

A. This is what I like to do.
Can you do it too?
Hop! Hop!
I can hop.
This is what I like to do.

B. This is what Tom likes to do.
Can you do it too?
Jump! Jump!
Tom can jump.
This is what Tom likes to do.

Activities:

1. Children print their poems and draw corresponding pictures.
2. Use a camera to take pictures of the children doing what

they like to do. Mount the pictures with the poems. Display in a "Poetry Corner" or send home as gifts.

Noun Poems Using names of things to make poems, e.g., house, room, train.

Objectives:

1. To interact and discuss familiar words.
2. To become more aware of things around them.

Strategies:

1. Children discuss things they can see around them, in a magazine, on the playground.
2. For practice, have one child say a noun word. Then other children say words that will compliment that word, e.g., train-long, fast, black, etc. Write the words down on a chart or on the blackboard. Read them with rhythmic beat. Sticks may be used.

Models:

A.
House
white
pretty
house
warm
big

B.
Train
long
train
fast
train
black

Activities:

1. Booklets can be made for either model. For words such as "house" or "train", make shape books.
2. For other words which may not be so easily made into their particular shape, illustrate with magazine pictures or children's drawings.
3. Children with writing skills may write their own poem, either in a two page booklet or a booklet that requires a

page for each word of that poem. The latter would require that they also write the complete poem on the first page of the book.

4. Covers for the books give children an incentive to use their artistic talents with crayons, paints or colored markers.

Creating a Fantasy Friend with Poetry.

Objective:

To understand "fantasy" and to talk about imaginary characters.

Strategies:

1. Discuss what "fantasy" means. Have children imagine a "fantasy" friend who will come in the room and spend time with the class.
2. Have children think of names for their "fantasy" friends.
3. As children name their "fantasy" friends, write the names. Have children describe how the "fantasy" friends look. The teacher writes the words.

Model:

A. Monster
Fat
Scary
Tall

Choose words easily used in rhyming or repetition, e.g., Monster, Fat, Scary, Tall, Very tall.

B. Tutti Frutti Monster
Is so fat
Is so scary
Tutti Frutti Monster
Is so tall
Is so very tall.

E.E.V.

Activities:

1. Children can cut out shapes of their "fantasy friends" and make collages out of scraps (either construction paper or cloth).
2. Display the collages.

Family Poems. Using names of family members.

Objectives:

1. To count the number of people in their families.
2. To name family members.

Strategies:

1. Discuss family members.
2. Count how many there are.
3. Count whether there are more boys or more girls.
4. Practice saying the names in a rhythmic manner and adding the names of how many there are.

Model:

A. Mom
Dad
And me
My brother
My sister
And me.

B. Two brothers
One sister
And me
One Mom
One Dad
And me.

Activities:

Model: A.

Have children make booklets with as many pages as the poem has lines. On each page, draw the person represented.

Children who print can write the poem and put it on the cover.

Model: B.

Using numbers for family members, have children make booklets. This time write large numerals next to the pictures on each page and print poem on the covers.

Using Sounds in Poetry

Objectives:

1. To associate sounds with their sources.

airport	rain
cars	bells
trucks	cats
ships	

2. To describe whether sounds are loud or soft.

3. To practice listening skills.

Strategies:

1. Discuss any of two lists you may have written on the board which depict sounds.

2. Have children say other words that come to their minds as they hear each word mentioned.

Models:

A. Cars and wheels
Cars and drivers
Cars are noisy
Cars go fast
Cars can bump
Cars can crash

Tap with a stick or clap as the poem is read.

Copy the child's poem or have them copy their own poems.

Make a composite of all the poems after each child has drawn a picture. Display these as a mural form.

Take A Walk Poems. Using powers of observation.

Objective:

To practice careful observation.

Strategies:

1. Take children for a walk to observe and remember things they see along the way.
2. After returning to the class room, write observations on the blackboard or chart.
3. Shortly after, take them on another walk. This time have them observe even more closely.
4. Return and again write things on the blackboard or chart.
5. Compare lists. (The second list should be longer than the first.)

Model:

Street	Grass
Trees	Bird on a tree
Houses	Bird's nest
Dogs	Clouds

Activity:

Each child chooses a word from the list for a poem.

Birds	Rain is wet
Birds in a nest	Rain is soft
Birds	Rain feels good
Birds in a tree	Rain comes fast
Birds are beautiful	Rain can't wait
Red and white	Rain goes away
Birds	

Activity:

Children can make six page booklets in the shape of raindrops.

Use separate pages for each line of the poem.

(Note: Richard Scary books have many pictures from which "sound" ideas may be derived.)

Prepoetry Activities--Rhythm using Choral Readings:

Objectives:

1. To develop language skills.
2. To experience various poetic techniques appropriate for each grade level.
3. To practice divergent thinking processes.

Strategies:

1. Create the following setting with a class:

"Relax and close your eyes and think back to a time when there were kings, queens, knights and damsels, dragons and demons. Imagine that you have been selected as the bravest person in the land and it's your job to find and destroy the feared Dragon of Devonshire. This dragon lives in the deepest, darkest part of the woods. It has devoured kings, queens, knights, and damsels, men, women, and little children. You have your trusty sword. Upon your horse you head into the deepest woods. It very quickly becomes gloomy and shadows hang in ghostly shimmering at every turn. As you ride the woods become impassible. On the far side, through the mist that swirls about the trees, you see a cave. A dark, foreboding cave. It is the den of the Dragon of Devonshire. You approach cautiously straining your eyes to see if the dragon is inside. Suddenly you freeze. There is a movement from deep inside. Your eyes adjust to the darkness. You can only stand and gaze at it in stunned silence. You have never seen anything like it before" (Plum, p. 34).

Divide the class into four groups. Each group lists or dictates as many words as possible that describe the dragon. Each group picks out four words that seem to go together. Each group leads practice for each group, calls out their words and claps out syllables as they are called.

The first group claps and calls out words twice and then the second group joins in with their claps and words. Other groups follow, each group repeats four times. (This "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" activity can provide practice in developing rhythm.) Repeat one more time.

This time, instead of clapping and words, use only sounds like snapping, hissing, clicking.

2. Start with the self.

Write your name one letter at a time down the side of a page. Write an attribute of yourself on each line that begins with that letter.

Model:
F Friendly
R Responsible
E Easy
D Daring

Write a five-line poem about yourself using the following form.

Model:
Line 1—your name
Line 2—two words to describe you
Line 3—three action words telling things you like to do.
Line 4—a four word phrase telling about an activity or characteristic
Line 5—your name or nickname.

3. Start with the seasons.

Use props (flowers in the spring, snowballs in winter, colored leaves in the fall) and list words for each. Write a couplet (2 lines that rhyme). List rhyming words together. Write a dictated couplet. Encourage students to write their own. Illustrate each poem. Combine poems and bind in a class book. Try triplets, quatrains, and limericks.

4. Start with bubbles.

Use water bubbles put on waxed paper with eye droppers, or soap bubbles blown into the air, or bubble gum. List words that describe each. Write comparisons.

Model: The bubbles floated like feathery clouds.

Encourage students to list as many comparisons as possible.

5. Start with feelings.

Read David was Ma[illegible]y Bill Martin or A Friend is Someone Who

Likes You by Joan Walsh Anglund. Discuss the book. List words that describe feeling or things that make one feel mad or happy. Dictate with the class a poem using a hiaku model. Illustrate the poems and bind into class books.

Model: Happiness
Little kitten paws upon my face
Trying to wake me up.

Using Poetry as a Spring Board for other Activities.

Objectives:

1. To enjoy poetry.
2. To take a basic idea and elaborate on it.
3. To encourage creativity.

Strategies:

Start with a poem. Use divergent activities to elaborate on the basic idea.

Model:

Home

Some houses are big
Some houses are small
Some houses are wide
Some houses are tall

So many houses
Wherever I roam
But the very best one
Is my own special home.

Activities:

1. Construct and decorate houses, using materials like milk cartons, standup houses, marshmallows, dough sculpture, or clay.
2. Make a table top community.
3. Ask a guest speaker to come into the class and discuss different materials used in building, such as blueprints.

4. Collect tools used in house-building.

5. Make a house book, with each page describing a room in the house.

6. Draw pictures of houses in a neighborhood or near the school. (King, 1976.)

Model: The Seasons

Summer is the reason
For playing and fun
Swimming and hiking
Water and sun

Winter is the season
When branches are bare
Snow on the mountains
Frost in the air

Autumn is the season
For leaves to fall down
Turning from bright green
To orange and brown

Spring is the season
For blossoming out
Fruit trees are blooming
And vegetables sprout

Activities:

1. Make a mandala--a circle divided into four parts. Illustrate a season in each quarter.

2. Windowpanes--divide a sheet of paper into 4 parts. Use crayon to draw a scene for each season. Brush with water colors.

3. List words for each season.

4. List special foods for each season. (King, 1976.)

Model:

My parents always rant and rave
About the things I want to save.
My room, I know, is much too small,
And things are piled along every wall.
But wouldn't you think just for my sake,
They'd let me keep my python snake?

Activities:

1. List things worth while saving.

2. Discuss things worth while saving that cannot be purchased (seashells, rocks).

3. Develop a list of things to be placed in a time capsule that will be buried for 100 years.

4. Make a collage of things saved. (Stanish, 1979.)

Prepoetry Activities--Rhyme

Objectives:

1. To develop language skills.
2. To experience various poetic techniques appropriate for each grade level.
3. To practice divergent thinking.

Strategies: Use games to encourage rhyming skills.

Activities:

1. Divide the class into pairs. Have one child say a word. The second child must add a word that rhymes. Continue adding words until no new words can be added. Choose a different root word and continue. (Bradley, 1976.)
2. Divide the class into groups. Give each a root word. The groups brainstorm lists of words that rhyme with the root word.
3. Form groups of four. Each group is given a set of rhyming rummy cards. (Cards can be made by the students using blank index cards.) They make pairs of rhyming words.
4. Use pairs of kids to make rhyming couplets. One child initiates, the other child responds. In early elementary grades, the teacher initiates and the students dictate a response. Teacher: I ate some cheese . . .

   Students: And fell on my knees.
5. Read aloud poems like "The Owl and the Pussycat." Students

call out the rhyme at the end of each stanza. (Dr. Seuss books are also good for this.)

6. Read a familiar poem like "Jack and Jill went up the hill," but substitute words so that there is no rhyme.

Jack and Jill went up the mountain
To fetch a pail of water.
Jack fell down and broke his head,
And Jill came tumbling along.

What is different about this poem? Discuss (Cheybey, p. 99).

Intermediate Activities

Start with Experiences

Objectives:

1. To enjoy poetry.
2. To generate a varied number of ideas and responses to stimuli.
3. To take a basic idea and elaborate on it.
4. To express one's self with clarity.

Strategies:

Start with an experience that is familiar to or can be made familiar to each student. List words and develop vocabulary dealing with the subject. Using models, move from the words to poetry, both rhyming and free verse.

Activities:

1. Start with a field trip around the school. Have students bring in objects which appeal to the senses. Arrange objects into piles that go together. List words that describe each pile. Write a sentence that describes how each pile feels, smells, etc.

Model: Sand is gritty,
Pebbles are hard,
Mud is squishy between my fingers.

Encourage each student to write their own poem (Cheybey, 1979, p. 90-91).

2. Start with unusual fruits like coconuts, papaya, pineapple. Taste each fruit. Or collect unusual scents like perfumes, tinctures. Smell each sample. Brainstorm words that describe the fruit or smell. With the class, dictate a cinquain using the following model.

Model:

Line	Syllables
1	2
2	4
3	6
4	8
5	2

Encourage students to write their own cinquains. Work in partners or work alone.

3. Start with the family. Name each member of the family and list descriptors for each member. Write a poem with only two words in each line.

Model:

My brother
Strong arms
Long hair
Baseball player
Very fast
Best friend

Draw a picture to illustrate the poem (Cheybey, 1979, p. 90).

Connotations

Objectives:

1. To develop phrases and words with favorable and unfavorable connotations.
2. To generate different ideas and points of view about a specific subject.

Strategies:

1. Read 2 selections on the same topic with opposite connotations.

Reread by phrases to identify details being discussed and determine whether the connotation is positive or negative. Analyze the choice of words.

Use board, overhead, or individual sheets to provide students with copies.

Example: (+) John is a tall, slender boy with fair skin and freckles.

(-) John is a bean-pole type of kid with a pasty skin that is blotched with dark spots.

2. Through group discussion, make a list of various qualities.

Specify words that describe the qualities in positive and/or negative terms.

Example:

Quality	Positive	Negative
fatness	plump, cushy, well-rounded	fat, dumpy, obese
neatness	orderly, organized, business-like	severe, stiff, antiseptic
disorderliness	casual, easy-going, lived-in	sloppy, messy

List simple statements. Help the group develop other sentences that give the same information in positive or negative terms.

3. List simple statements. Help the group develop other sentences that give the same information in positive or negative terms.

Example: Marie has red hair

(+) Marie's hair shines like a copper penny.

(-) Marie's hair looks like shredded carrots.

Activities:

1. With younger children, play "Thumbs up-thumbs down." Say a "loaded" word. Ask children to show their thumbs pointing up or down to indicate whether the word conveys a positive or negative mood.

2. Make a chart. List generic words in the left column, and put 2 blank columns beside it. (Label with drawings of a Smile and Frown, respectively.) Ask children to find a word from the word box to fill in the blank columns.

Example:

(Idea)	☺	☹
child		
horse		

Word Box
brat
nag
angel
beauty
plug
darling

3. Read published poems. Find positive and negative phrases.

4. Display pictures of various subjects such as old house, soldier, storm, sea, thistle, spinach. Allow children to write loaded phrases or words on slips of paper and post near the appropriate picture. (Provide slips in an envelope tacked on board and hang a pencil from a string.)

5. Distribute copies of a published poem in which phrases have been altered to change the mood. Ask children to edit to reverse the mood.

6. Choose a published poem. Have children alter the phrases or words to change the mood.

7. Ask children to write original poems in either or both moods.

Example: Green is slimy,
Green is yuck.
I don't like to see it
Except on a buck!

or Green is fresh;
Green is bright.
I like to see it all the time.
It's such a lovely sight.

(Gray, 1976, pp. 56-7.)

Create a poem by answering questions.

Objective:

To assist student in creating poetry.

Strategy:

Ask students to respond to specific questions using the following pattern:

1) Name a specific subject.

Set 1	Model:
1. What is your favorite kind of (three)?	Birch tree
2) Describe the subject's appearance, actions, responses.	
2. What does this look like?	Tall and slim and white
3. What does it do (when the wind blows)?	Swaying in the wind
4. How does it look (on a dark night)?	A dancer in the darkness
3) Express personal feeling or idea about it.	
5. What (person, thing, place, situation) does it remind you of:	A lonely lady in a thin gown

Revised Model:
Birch tree
Slender and white
Swaying in the wind
A lonely lady in a thin gown
Dancing in the darkness

Set 2

1. What is your favorite____(season, holiday, ceremony, activity)___?
2. What special objects come to mind when you think of it?
3. What colors does it make you think of?
4. What special smells or sounds does it recall?
5. What activities do children do then?
6. What do the adults do?
7. What happens at the end?
8. How do you feel at the end?

Activities:

1. Utilize the question patterns to stimulate children to create poems to accompany a bulletin board display of scenes appropriate to the various holidays that children enjoy throughout the year. Use this approach to spice up their drawings or commercial holiday posters purchased.

2. Use a pattern to coordinate poem writing with the study of animals in science, events or people encountered in a social studies unit, or to describe a favorite character from a book.

3. Allow a student to make a book report in poem form using these questions.

4. Guide the group into generating a list of questions suitable for various specific subjects.

Rock: What are you made of?
Where did you come from?
What has happened to you?

(Gray, 1976, p. 16.)

Revising and Editing Techniques

Objectives:

1. To revise original poems using 3 simple techniques.
2. To test the final product by repeated readings or by taping and listening. (This is also applicable to prose writing.)

Strategies:

1. Eliminate unnecessary words. Compress the poem to remove all padding, usually by striking a, an, and the as well as some adjectives and similes from titles and from certain places in the body of the poem.

Model:

The ocean is a lot like spring,	The ocean is like spring,
It is violent in its changes. . .	Violent in its changes. . .

2. Play with rearranging lines or words on a line to improve phrase structure.

Model:

The ocean is like a	The ocean is like a lion,
Lion, clawing at the stubborn	Clawing at the stubborn shore;
Shore, but a lake is like a	But a lake is like a lamb,
Lamb, . . .	

3. Improve the flow and the sound of the lines by selecting words that create the desired mood--smooth for serious poems, bouncy for light subjects. Look and listen for jerky spots. Try to repeat important sounds. Choose words with appropriate accents.

Model:

But a lake is like a lamb	While a lake is like satin
	Shimmering in the sunlight

Activities:

1. Purposely write lines that are awkward in regard to one of the specific strategies above. Or change an unfamiliar published poem. Ask students to change the line(s) or word(s) to improve the writing.

2. Using the activity noted above, use the bulletin board for this process by extending the activity through a week or so. Write the poem or lines on the board, leaving generous space between the lines. Allow the children to write suggested changes on slips of paper provided in an envelope tacked to the corner of the board.

3. As a later activity, if the students don't feel threatened, ask them to make suggestions to help each other revise their original poems. Stress the fact that forthcoming suggestions do not have to be accepted or even responded to. No defending needed!

(Gray, 1976. pp. 119-20.)

Writing Acrostics

Objective:

To write a poem using a particular form. (The first word of each line begins with a specific letter, which is determined by the subject of the poem. This is the poetic form used often in the Book of Psalms, in medieval liturgy, and in 19th century valentines. It is revived from time to time by contemporary poets.)

Strategy:

Present model poems.

Read poems and discuss. Select a subject and compose a group poem. Encourage children to choose a specific word category (object) in house, proper name, animal, etc.) and describe it, using the form.

Model:

J umping
A ll over the
C andlestick. Now you
K now my name. *p. 15

S ensual
E xciting
X -rated.

*8th grader, p. 175

A P E N C I L
P lease
E veryone
N ever break
C ut me
I write
L ovely. Don't break me.

*5th grader, p. 171

Activities:

1. Begin bulletin board display of pictures using faces only or scenes that show emotion. Discuss the emotions and sensations depicted (sweating, nausea, chills). Elicit personal recollections of similar situations.

Complete display with acrostic poems contributed by self and students.

2. Repeat procedure with pictures of geographic locations, either specific (Eiffel Tower, Mt. Rushmore, own house) or general (deep woods, seashore, desert).

Each day, briefly discuss details of various pictures, encouraging children to "see" more details. Make word lists by each picture.

In a few days, ask children to each choose a picture and make a title, or to choose a word from one of the lists and write an acrostic poem.

3. Draw a large triangle or other shape on paper. On each side of the shape write a line that connects at the corner with the next line. Reader will have to turn paper to read poem. (Walch, 1976. p. 119-also p. 15, 171, 175 as noted by poems).

Concrete Poems

Objectives:

1. To expose students to a simple but dramatic form of poetry.
2. To assist them in writing poetry using "concrete" form.

Strategy:

Show and read some concrete poems[1]—poems that exist in space, that are physical. They use the arrangement and shape of letters in words to add to their meaning.

Display posters of concrete poems.

Develop group poems from classroom objects: desk, pencil window.

Discuss possible subjects from students' environment or experiences.

Examples:

LONG RINGED WRIGGLY GOOD BAIT

Activities:

1. Use crayons, magic markers or other coloring tools to add color dimension.
2. Make a group poem on large piece of butcher paper. Depict a large scene such as the classroom, the school, a bedroom. Students share responsibility for the details.

---

[1]Numerous copyrighted examples may be found in Cosman, 1979. p. 23ff.

Editing Content

Objective:

To use questions which guide the editing process so that messages to readers are forceful and effective.

Strategy:

Use the following set of questions to evaluate a group poem. Older students may make use of the guidelines on individual basis after sufficient group practice.

1. What part of our poem do you like best? Can you tell why?
2. Is there any part that should be changed?
3. Which words are most interesting? Why do you notice them?
4. Are there parts of the poem where more important words should be used?

Be certain that students recognize that there are no single "right" answers to these questions. The answers depend on individual experiences and viewpoint.

Be absolutely certain that the teacher gives no personal response to the question(s).

Remind students that all writing is a 3-step process: a taking-in, a giving-out, and a re-shaping.

(Stewig, 1975. p. 220ff.)

Secondary Activities

Exaggeration

Objectives:

1. To take a basic idea and elaborate on it.
2. To learn to use hyperbole.

Strategies:

Students will practice deliberately exaggerating a situation for effect—for emphasis. The use of exaggeration in this manner is called hyperbole. When someone says, "I was scared to death", the listener knows that it is not literally true, but rather the situation is exaggerated to describe how very scared the person really was.

Activity:

Have students complete the following sentences so that they use hyperbole.

1. "I was so tired. . ."
2. "John was so little. . ."
3. "The cat is mean enough. . ."
4. "My car is so old..."
5. "She is as phony. . ."
6. "The house is big enough. . ."
7. "So deep in love am I. . ."
8. "My little sister gets dirty enough. . ."
9. "The teacher is as unreasonable. . ."
10. "I hate spinach so much. . ."

Model: "November Poem"

"After reading poems
from the Paris Review
I ask
what is a poet?
No more than a breeze
and as enduring
as the ocean.
I wish I was one."

Anara Guard (Stacy, 1974. pp. 38-9.)

Gambits

Objective:

To use similes and metaphors for creative comparisons.

Strategies:

By completing these sentences the students stretch their existing vocabulary while learning to view commonplace situations with a fresh sense of imagery. With guidance from the teacher, these 'sentence starters' can lead the student in the desired direction.

Activity:

Have students complete several of the phrases below. Encourage them to be creative, to use their imagination, and to stay away from trite responses. Once they have the idea, let them create the entire gambit, expanding on the initial sentence if desired.

For a specific gambit, have each student turn in one completed response. Assemble on the board to create a group poem. Then have students expand a different gambit to create their own poem.

Models:

1. As yellow as. . .
2. Quieter than. . .
3. Rougher than. . .
4. As stubborn as. . .
5. Richer than. . .
6. Loneliness is . . .
7. Hatred is . . .
8. I'd hate to lose. . .
9. I used to think (believe). . . but now I know. . .
10. . . .I love you (for, because)

Example: #10

"Tree I love you for
after the leaves have played their
part you let them free."

Geraldine Exposito

(Stacy, 1974. p. 122; Shuman, 1973. p. 1267.)

Gambits--Imagination Teasers

Objectives:

To create images which use the absurd for effect.

Model:

Writing poetry is more boring
than eating rocks off pavement plates.
For when you read what you have
written,
It makes about as much sense
as leaves walking upside down
on the moon.
If we must rely on poetry to
clear our minds
(And often I think we must)
Then we must be like Rainbows
flying to the Sun longing to go
home.

Susan Huskey

Strategy:

The images in this poem are imagination teasers. They use the absurd for effect. It does not matter that they don't make sense; what is more important is the striking image that is used.

Activity:

Have students complete the phrases below. They can then write their own phrases.

1. "Singing off key is more. . .than"
2. "Eating watermelon is more. . .than"
3. "Reading a dictionary is more. . .than"
4. "If I were a giant. . .(a fish, an ice cube, a dishwasher, a catsup bottle, a kernel of popcorn, a rollerskate, etc.)

(Stacy, 1974. p. 31)

Finding THE Right Word--Definition

Objectives:

1. To express oneself with clarity and conciseness.
2. To extend vocabulary.

Activity:

There are numerous ways to write a definition. They can be dull or exciting, specific or suggestive. Have your students practice writing definitions that will excite their readers. Remind them to avoid clichés! Triteness is not at all exciting.

1. A turkey is. . .
2. Suicide is. . .
3. Marriage is. . .
4. Going steady is. . .
5. Frost on windows is. . .
6. Sea shells are. . .
7. An auto accident is. . .

Models:

Turkey
is a big bird
That smothers people with
Leftovers for three weeks to get
Revenge.
James Junko

(description of an auto accident)

this morning
I attended the shotgun wedding
of two beauties.
but they had only
a few moments
of estranged embrace,
and were pulled apart again
so the people
could be removed.
James Wainess

(Stacy, 1974. pp. 46-9.)

Finding THE Right Word--Synonyms

Objectives:

1. To express oneself with clarity and conciseness.

2. To extend vocabulary.

Activity:

Have students list words or phrases which mean the same as the ones below.

Models:

1. TO BE ABSENT FROM SCHOOL: lay out, lie out, play hooky, play truant, skip, skip school, ditch, flick, flake school, blow school

2. NAME FOR POCKETKNIFE: knife, penknife, jackknife, clasp knife, Barlow, Barlow knife, blade, switchblade

3. GOT AHEAD OF YOU IN LINE: cut in, jumped line, broke in line, broke up, scrounged, pulled up, butted in line

4. SOMEONE WHO IS DELIBERATELY BEING SILLY IS: acting the fool, cutting the fool, cutting up, acting up, clowning around, jiving around, flicking it

(Agee, 1972. pp. 879-80.)

Personification

Objective:

To develop the ability to respond to things from different points of view.

Strategies:

In this activity the student will learn to use personification--giving of human characteristics to inanimate objects, animals, or ideas.

Activities:

Have students create sentences using personification to describe these nouns:

1. winter
2. fear
3. cat
4. excitement
5. table and chair
6. restaurant

Model:

"Togetherness"

Dust particles are living in the
Grooves of the piano stool
Careful to hide themselves.
Grouped together they have company,
But how sad, it brings their end much nearer--
The dust rag will seize them in
Time.

Miriam Markowitz

(Stacy, 1974. p. 35.)

Model:

Sears and Roebuck Kenmore Dishwasher

My tummy rumbles
with the swish of
hot water and
sudless detergent
as glasses and cups
whirl in the gurgle
of the continuous hum
of my cycle.

I pump out the
old and pump in the
new and rinse,
spray, splash,
clinking the plates,
nozzling the pans.

When that is done, I
light up my
red-cable element
and with my hot
breath, I dry
to a crisp shine
my porcelain clients.

J.P.M.

Irony

Objectives:

1. To teach the students how to use irony.
2. To respond to things from different points of view.
3. To elaborate on a basic idea.

Strategies:

Irony is using words that express the opposite of what is really meant—to put the unexpected together. Help students begin

thinking about opposites by listing examples of such contrasts on the board.

devotion/desertion
hope/despair
pleasing/painful

Have the students write poems which demonstrate that these opposites often exist side by side.

Models:

A bright orange fungus
on a dirty piece of wood
is fall's last flower.

Jeanne Shields

If you will give me your hand,
I shall give you mine
And we'll walk through
each other's head
and feel the stupidity
Squishing between our toes.

Mary Lou Williams

(Stacy, 1974. p. 154.)

Using Music in the Writing of Poetry

Objectives:

1. To demonstrate poetry's similarity to music.
2. To understand how poems can imitate music through rhythm, alliteration, sound, onomatopoeia.
3. To generalize students' good feelings about music to poetry.

Strategies:

1. Give students copies of "Jazz Fantasia" by Carl Sandburg; read in an expressive 'jazzy' way.
2. Listen to jazz: Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Dizzy Gillespie, Bennie Goodman.
3. Have students point out jazz qualities in the poem: the beat,

rapid changes in tempo, imitations of sounds of various instruments, possible subject of jazz (fights, loneliness, troubles, etc.), softness and loudness for mood.

4. Play music with various moods: Chopin's piano etudes and sonatas, rock from the Rolling Stones or Doors, blues and rock from Sarah Vaughn or Janis Joplin, ragtime music from Scott Joplin, guitar music of Andre Segovia or Chet Atkins, classical jazz of the Walter Murphy Band. (Note: instrumental music works best.)

5. Let students write whatever comes to mind.

Other Variations:

1. Use other poems with a particular musical beat—"Weary Blues" by Langston Hughes. Use it with the blues singers such as Billie Holliday.

2. For younger groups, present music without an illustrating poem. Listen to the particular music first, then ask students to discuss rhythm, tone or mood, emotion, possible subject matter, sounds, etc. Play music again and let students write.

Model:

"Jazz Fantasia"

Drum on your drums, batter on your banjoes,
sob on the long cool winding saxophones.
Go to it, O jazzmen.

Sling your knuckles on the bottom of the happy
tin pans, let your trombones ooze, and go husha-
husha-hush with the slippery sand-paper.

Moan like an autumn wind high in the lonesome treetops,
moan soft like you wanted somebody terrible, cry like a racing
car clipping away from a motorcycle cop, bang-bang! you
jazzmen, band altogether drums, traps, banjoes, horns, tin
cans-make two people fight on the top of a stairway and
scratch each other's eyes in a clinch tumbling down the stairs.

Can the rough stuff. . .now a Mississippi steam boat pushes up the night river with a hoo-hoo-hoo-oo. . .and the green lanterns calling to the high soft starts. . .a red moon rides on the humps of the low river hills. . .go to it, O jazzmen.

Carl Sandburg

(Knapp, 1965. p. 40.)

Haiku

Objective:

To write haiku (a poetic form which uses understatement, precise words, and a concrete common but surprising experience).

Strategy:

1. Give copies of various haiku to children. (Original Japanese haiku is best for the sense and feel of haiku.)

Example:

On a withered branch
A crow has settled
Autumn nightfall.
Basho

What a pretty kite
The beggar's children are flying
High above their hut.
Izza

or other Japanese authors:

The sun's way
Holly hock turns toward it
Through all the rains of May.

(Note: These haiku lost strict 5-7-5 format when translated into English.)

2. Using inductive methods as much as possible, lead students to understand that haiku:

A. Means more than it says.
B. Refers to nature in some way.
C. Refers to a particular event happening now.
D. Quietly suggests emotion of poet.
E. Follows a strict form, 5-7-5. (5 syllables, 1st line; 7 syllables, 2nd line; 5 syllables, 3rd line.)

Activities:

The first line of a haiku establishes the setting or situation. Have students write a haiku about a Fourth of July celebration with a large crowd of old and young people reacting to the display. Use the following first line, "Rockets split dark skies". Students finish the poem. Other first lines which may be used are: The pond is stagnant

Winter's proudest crown

Reflections in a glass

Children in the rain

Students may suggest first lines in class discussion.

Using Haiku to Help Students Edit Their Own Poetry

Objective:

To become more concise in using exact words through Haiku form in poetry.

Strategy:

1. After students have been writing awhile and have done Haiku, find some poetry or prose of theirs which is not concise, has many general adjectives and nouns, passive voice and/or indefinite time reference.

2. Write a haiku summarizing the writing into a few major ideas. Picking out key words, change time reference to now, find precise verbs, use active voice.

Model: "Me and my brother finally get the funnies. I grab Flash to see if he kills the monster and saves the princess. But he's captured by the mad Doctor Zin and is held by a secret force that Doctor Zin invented. Shucks! Got to wait till tomorrow to find out, doggonit."

"Wonder what happened
To Flash Gordon and Tarzan—
and sunny Sundays"
Joe, age 13

(Esbensen, 1975. pp. 73-74).

Using Pictures and Film in Poetry Writing

Objective:

To become more responsive to variety and detail.

Strategies:

1. Pictures can stimulate the senses. Use magazine pictures, slides, photos, or transparencies which depict interesting details, textures, situations, or patterns. Also valuable is a filmstrip series, Come to Your Senses, which has four filmstrips with hundreds of single shots to provoke responses. Slides or the opaque projector reflections of great works of art by artists such as Brueghel, Renoir, or Van Gogh are helpful, too.

2. To help children write poems about these subjects several steps can be used.

a. If the pictures have human or animal subjects in them, have the students take the point of view of a person or an animal in the picture. Ask questions such as: How does this subject feel about the situation? What has happened? What will happen? What memories does the subject have? What goals does the subject have? The last line should be a clincher—a summary, a question or the most revealing statement.

b. Good pictures to use are Brueghel's The Peasant Dance, Landscape with the fall of Icarus, Hunters in the Snow,

or Peasant Wedding; also Winslow Homer's Life Line, Fog Warning, Kissing the Moon, or Breezing Up. For Brueghel's Landscape with the fall of Icarus, read W. H. Auden's Musee des Beaux Arts as a model.

3. Using films can stimulate response to variety in life. The film Rain Shower can be used to stimulate poems that have sequence and that show rather than tell. The film is of an actual rainshower, using no narration. It includes vivid portrayals of man, animal, machine, and nature. Students' poems can also show the rainshower's beginning, middle, and end through the use of descriptive scenes. Caution students not to make direct statements about the rain's progress. The emphasis is on showing as the film does.

(Flexner, 1966. Foote, 1968.)

Poetry (Lyrics, Doggerel, Verse) in the Everyday World

Objectives:

1. To relate type, form, and technique of writing to the audience or purpose for writing a poem (or verse).
2. To show that forms of poetry are important in the practical world.

Activity:

1. Have students find examples of how poetry is actually used in the world. Possible sources are ads, lyrics of music, greeting cards, fillers in newspapers, nursery rhymes, and testimonials. Display the examples.

2. Discuss and relate each poem's audience, purpose, and features.

Example: lyrics of a rock song

a. Main audience: young people aged 10-30

b. Purpose: to entertain, talk about experiences of youth, lost love, for example.

c. Features: dominant beat, probably rhymes; words using a vocabulary most young people would understand; subject matter could be about love or rejection of authority.

d. The features would relate to audience and purpose in these ways:

1. The beat, rhyme and basic words relate to the nature of the music.

2. Basic vocabulary is necessary for most to understand.

3. Both rhyme and beat are used to contribute to the entertainment.

4. Topics directly found in the experiences of youth would appeal to this group.

5. Have students choose a favorite rock tune that most know. Work in groups or individually to generate rock lyrics.

3. Mention that rock lyrics aren't necessarily good poetry, but a type of verse we hear all the time.

4. Writing jingles for ads, verse for greeting cards, nursery rhymes and testimonial ballads can be included in this unit.

Word Rummy

Objective:

To use vocabulary available to student.

Activity:

Using vocabulary flash cards, or words from the dictionary, have each person choose a word from a 'hat'. Each student writes an interesting line using this word. When finished, combine the lines to make a group poem. To vary this activity, have each person draw two or three words and then use them all in a one, two or three-line poem.

(Lusk, 1974. p. 14.)

Colorbook Poems

Objective:

To use the senses to stimulate the writing of poetry.

Activity:

Gather some simple materials that make distinct sounds—a glass and table knife or a button, a newspaper, a ruler. Tell students to close their eyes. While you make sounds, ask students to try to associate each sound with a color. Stomp, clap, strike glass with knife, crumple newspaper, slap desk with ruler. After each sound, ask the group what color that sound provoked. Next, students write poems about colors and sounds, trying to associate colors with personalities (What color is mother, the boss, America, God?) or with ideas (What color is love, war, summer, work?). As they write their poems they should try to use a color in each line.

Model: Night Clouds

The white mares of the moon rush along the sky
Beating their golden hoofs upon the glass heavens;
The white mares of the moon are all standing on their hind legs
Pawing at the green porcelain doors of the remote heavens.
Fly, mares!
Strain your utmost,
Scatter the milky dust of stars,

Or the tiger sun will leap upon you and destroy you
With one lick of his vermilion tongue.

(Lusk, 1974. p. 14.)

Sounds of Poetry

Objective:

To use sounds to stimulate the writing of poetry.

Strategy:

Students can be taught to use words with specific sounds for more descriptive language. For example, soft sounds such as the letter "s" or long vowels produce a quiet, soothing effect, a slow pace. Hard sounds, such as d's and b's produce harsh, hostile, violent connotations. Short, staccato sentences speed up a poem, thereby describing a quick, hurried atmosphere.

Activity: Street Sounds

Listen to the sounds outside. What exactly do you hear? What does it remind you of? Try to catch their qualities in words so that writing sounds that way too.

Model: Chicago

Hog Butcher for the World
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler;
Stormy, husky, brawling,
City of the Big Shoulders:
. . .

Carl Sandburg

Activity: Soft Poems

List words with extremely soft sounds. Write a poem using many of these words. If you use other words that are not on your list, be sure they are also soft.

Model: Silver

Slowly, silently, now the moon
Walks the night in her silver shoon;
This way, and that, she peers, and sees
Silver fruit upon silver trees;
. . .

Walter De la Mere

Activity: Hard Poems

List words with extremely hard sounds--d's, b's, t's. Write a poem using many of these words. If you use other words that are not on your list be sure they are also hard.

Model: The Santa-Fe Trail

. . .
WHILE SMOKE-BLACK FREIGHTS ON THE DOUBLE-TRACKED RAILROAD,
DRIVEN AS THOUGH BY THE FOUL FIEND'S OX-GOAD,
SCREAMING TO THE WEST COAST, SCREAMING TO THE EAST,
CARRY OFF A HARVEST, BRING BACK A FEAST,
AND HARVESTING MACHINERY AND HARNESS FOR THE BEAST,
THE HAND-CARS WHIZ, AND RATTLE ON THE RAILS,
THE SUNLIGHT FLASHES ON THE TIN DINNER-PAILS

Vachel Lindsay

(Lusk, 1974. p. 35. Corbin, 1968. p. 80.
Foster, 1963. p. 100, p. 83.)

Nursery Rhymes

Objective:

Without using the actual nursery rhyme, students will elaborately reflect the mood of the original rhyme.

Activity:

Pick a nursery rhyme (Humpty Dumpty, Little Bo Peep). Strip it of rhymes, and rewrite it, retaining the theme, carefully reflecting the mood. Do not rhyme. For instance, without rhymes to make it funny, Humpty Dumpty is a very sad poem.

Model: Humpty Dumpty

Humpty Dumpty was called an egg by some.
He watched over the kingdom from his site on the wall.
As he surveyed the countryside one day,
He toppled over and fell to the ground,
His body scattering in all directions on the fields below.
The knights tried to piece the poor body together,
But, alas, they failed!

J.G.S.

(Lusk, 1974. p. 26.)

Evaluation of Poetry

Because poetry is a "chunk" of the student's psyche and inappropriate criticism can damage creativity, the problem of evaluation and grading needs to be addressed. The following paragraphs and activities discuss evaluation and grading according to the needs of specific grade levels.

Evaluation At The Elementary Level

Primary level poetry can be evaluated using some of the following methods. Oral poetry, that which is dictated by the class or individual, is usually written by teacher scribes and would be in need of content evaluation only.

Conference The teacher takes the student aside and listens to a reading of the poem. While the student reads, the teacher with eraser in hand, removes surface errors. The teacher and student "fix" the poem together. The student then rewrites the poem on good paper.

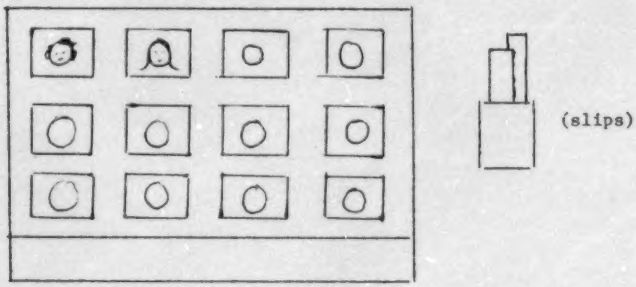
Content Conference The teacher can use informal conferences to develop a student's ability to use poetic form. The following conversation might take place.

Teacher: Tell me about your poem.
Student: The cat ran over the hill.
Teacher: What kind of cat?
Student: A grey smokey cat.
Teacher: Let's add that to your poem. The grey smokey cat. . .How did he run?
Student: Fast.
Teacher: The grey smokey cat ran fast over the hill. What kind of hill?
Student: A sandy hill.
Teacher: Let's add that to your poem. The grey smokey cat ran fast over the sandy hill.

Peer Evaluation Students can exchange papers to edit content and mechanics. At the lower elementary level, students can illustrate a classmate's paper.

Here is an easy way for the teacher to write a short but helpful critique in response to individual children's progress in spelling, printing skills, or even reversals. Children like it because they can check themselves at any time. Parents can easily be made aware of areas in which their children need improvement.

1. Use 3X4 tag board envelopes.
2. Take individual pictures of the children in class.
3. Attach pictures on individual envelopes. Lable each with a child's name.
4. Cut 2X5 strips of light colored construction paper. The teacher writes comments on the strips and puts them in the envelopes.
5. Arrange all envelopes on a board or bulletin board where they are easily accessible.
6. Make a sign below the composite which says: WE ARE IMPROVING.



The following list of questions may be helpful for evaluating poetry written by primary and intermediate children. They could also be for upper grades and high school.

1. What did this piece do for the child who wrote it?
2. Does this child's poem show a touch of originality?
3. Is this poem a genuine expression of feeling, or was the child just trying to complete an assignment?
4. Does this poem have an inner tune that matches the thought?
5. Does this poem make you see pictures? Does it have imagery?

(Applegate, 1963. p. 53 ff.)

Evaluation At The Secondary Level

In discussing evaluation at the junior and senior high level, it is important to distinguish between evaluation and grading. Evaluation should be feedback from the teacher and possibly peers, focusing mainly on the strengths of poems and providing constructive criticism. Grading should be based on evaluation. Giving students grades on creative exercises is always a thorny chore because many variables are involved. How hard a student works, progress made, ability level, and even differing perceptions of aesthetics are factors in grading and evaluation. Any system one uses must keep this in mind.

It is wise to have a clear objective for all writing assignments so students know what is to be valued in a poem or lesson. A general rule here could be that poetry is language that excites (Esbensen, p. 12). Any use of language that excites whether it be imagery, word choice, metaphor, melody, meaning, etc. could be classified as a step toward good poetry and this should be communicated to the student.

Evaluations should initially be carried on by the teacher and then, under certain conditions, by peers. If peers are going to evaluate each other's poetry, the students should know this before they write. Peer evaluation works well, especially when students have been writing small group poems, or poems heavily directed by the teacher on a specific subject, form, or technique. This in many cases, allows all students to have a common base or purpose to refer to. Personal poems and free writing poems should be read and evaluated only when students have given their permission and feel a certain

amount of confidence in themselves as writers. If peer evaluation is done, allowing the student to choose the peer who will do the evaluating may help.

Teacher evaluation of student poetry is best done by pointing out positive elements. This can be done on the student's papers and with periodic conferences with the student. The student conference is especially helpful in encouraging editing by addressing elements of word choice, conciseness, and clarity.

When faced with giving grades for units or periods of poetry writing, a three-level system may be helpful. The average grade would be an "X" or a "2" designating satisfactory work. A very good poem that uses exciting language and is nearly a finished product would earn a double "XX" or "3". A "/" or "1" would be given for slipshod or trite work where little effort is seen. All work could be edited and reworked and could eventually receive a full "X" or a double "XX." Let us say the minimum amount of poetry is three poems a week when three to five strategies a week are introduced. This allows students some flexibility, considering that they may not have been able to produce a poem to their liking for all strategies taught that week. Extra poetry beyond the required three could be counted by giving extra credit for hard work. This system allows for praise of fine work—the double "XX". It notifies students of unusually poor work, and the teacher does not have to split hairs over average work (is it a "C" or a "B"?).

Giving final grades for the unit could work this way. There would be no grades under "C" if all required pieces were handed in. "B's" would be given if there were more work or work of higher quality handed in. "A's" would be given to students who handed in much work,

work of highest quality, and those who improved their work the most. Quality and talent, and quantity and diligence are rewarded here, by stimulating students to do their best work without quashing. their creativity with feelings of failure. "Trying" should be rewarded in teaching creative writing.

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Wisconsin Writing Project Participants

Summer 1981

Marlene Anklam
Edgerton Elementary Schools

Sue Batt
Waterloo Schools

Nancy Bicha-Dale
University Lake School
Hartland

Jan Bonsett-Veal
Deerfield Middle/high School

Nancy Booth
Deerfield Elementary School

Vaughn Paul Bossell
Menominee School District
Keshena

Coleen Burns
Wilton Elementary School

Linda Christensen
Verona High School

Jeffery D. Conn
Homestead High School
Mequon

Larry Ehrhorn
Wisconsin Heights High School
Mazomanie

Lori Hamann
Jefferson Middle School
Madison

Diane Hein
Orchard Ridge Elementary
Madison

Peggy Jewell
Kettle Moraine High School
Wales

Elizabeth M. Jones
Dousman Elementary School

Paula Laundrie
Waterloo Elementary

Cindy Lewis
Windsor Elementary School

Beverly Martin
Keshena Elementary School

Jackie Martindale
Lodi High School

Fran McGuire
Middleton High School

Susan McKamey
Neopit Elementary School

Brian Moushey
Deerfield Middle School

Penny Parsons
Wisconsin Heights High School
Mazomanie

Susan Perry
Lincoln Elementary School
Madison

Michael Scheer
Sabish Jr. High School
Fond du Lac

Kathleen Schneider
Kettle Moraine High School
Wales

Joan Shaw
Woodworth Jr. High School
Fond du Lac

William Shaw
Woodworth Jr. High School
Fond du Lac

Estela Valdez
Park Elementary School
Cross Plains

Carole Vincent
E. G. Kromrey School
Middleton

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Individuals desiring information concerning the Wisconsin Writing Project should write to:

Wisconsin Writing Project
Teacher Education Building
University of Wisconsin
225 North Mills Street
Madison, Wisconsin 53706
(608)263-4614